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SUBJECT: SPANISH PARTICIPANT CRITICAL OF KOBE WORLD  
CONFERENCE ON DISASTER REDUCTION (WCDR)

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[B](#). MADRID 149

[1](#)1. ESTHOFF met with Interior Ministry, Directorate General for Civil Protection and Emergencies, International Affairs Director Juan Pedro Lahore Lacoste-Pedelaborde February 18 to ascertain Spain's thoughts regarding the January 18-22 Kobe WCDR and whether Spain planned an extra-EU contribution to international efforts to install a tsunami early warning system in the Indian Ocean. Lahore, who represented the Interior Ministry at Kobe, said he left the conference with "mixed feelings." While welcoming the greater interest in these issues engendered by the December 26 tsunami tragedy, Lahore also said the tsunami had "hijacked" the Kobe conference and led to a "PR-focused" declaration, which concentrated too much on disaster relief and not enough on the more critical disaster prevention part of the disaster reduction equation. He pointed to the commitment to reduce disaster deaths by one half as one example of the empty sloganeering that he believed plagued the conference.

[1](#)2. Lahore thought the experts who drafted many of the WCDR outcome documents had a poor understanding of the realities faced by the government representatives, like himself, who actually control disaster reduction resources. He called for a more "holistic" approach to disaster reduction which better integrates both disaster prevention and disaster reaction. Lahore clearly did not believe that a high-tech earthquake detection system in the Indian Ocean was the best use of limited global disaster reduction funds. The focus on such a system, in Lahore's view, symbolized the hijacking of the conference. He said the money would be better spent literally teaching peasants in the Indian Ocean basin to run up hill at first reports of incoming tsunamis. He said early warning systems were of limited utility unless they were complemented, as in Japan, by serious evacuation route planning. Saying he was no friend of Castro, he pointed to Cuba as one country who has made serious disaster reduction efforts on very limited budgets.

[1](#)3. After he got all that off his chest, Lahore indicated that Spain planned no extra-EU contribution to international efforts to install a tsunami early warning system in the Indian Ocean. That said, Madrid, via the EU, would provide financial and technical support to German-led efforts to assume a leadership role in such efforts. Lahore also said the EU plans to develop its own tsunami early warning system and that elements of this system could be applied to efforts to create a related system in the Indian Ocean basin. The EU, he added, would likely invite North African nations to participate in the development of this EU system, as a major seismic zone slices through the Mediterranean basin.

[1](#)4. COMMENT: Lahore is a true believer in a holistic approach to disaster reduction (i.e., don't forget prevention while pursuing the more media friendly relief). He is probably unaccustomed to having his work in the world's spotlight (as it was in January) and his belly-aching about Kobe's focus on the Asian tsunami crisis should probably be interpreted as a man frustrated by the fact his life's work was not portrayed in a nuanced or balanced fashion. Spain cares about this set of issues, but it does so for reasons that lie closer to home. Lahore mentioned the tsunamis that devastated Lisbon in the 18th century and Sicily in the 19th century, as well as the fact that the Balearic Islands were hit by a two meter tall wave after a 1990s earthquake in Algeria. Spain will continue to engage in tsunami detection efforts, but mostly within the EU context.

MANZANARES